

Standpoint Know-How

According to the influential standpoint epistemology programme, certain social positions give rise to *standpoints* that provide their bearers with epistemic advantages. This is to say that standpoints put groups in a position to acquire certain pieces of knowledge, and to talk of knowledge as situated. While not interrogated, the standard use of 'knowledge' in this literature is largely taken to be propositional in nature, that is, the knowledge that such-and-such is the case. For example, it might take the form of knowing *that* oppression takes a certain form. I will argue that in addition to know-that, groups can possess what I call *standpoint know-how*.

§1 Introduces standpoint epistemology. Theorists have argued that social positions engender certain standpoints that puts their bearers in a better position to gain certain forms of knowledge. Proponents include Collins (1986), Harding (1992), Hartsock (1998), Fricker (1999) Wylie (2003) Rolin (2009) Pohlhaus (2012), Toole (2020). For example, if one wants to know about the climate of sexual harassment and microaggressions in a workplace, they would do well to ask women and not men. That is to say, standpoints come with an *epistemic advantage*, such that oppressed groups are better at knowing certain things than those with privilege. Importantly, belonging to a social group isn't enough to have this advantage. Standpoints aren't automatic. Rather, standpoints are achievements that must be earned and must be developed as a group. This process is referred to as 'consciousness raising'. Standardly, the assumption seems to be that this situated knowledge would be a form of propositional knowledge.

§2 argues that we can better understand many instances of standpoint knowledge instead as know-how, not know-that. Philosophers such as Gilbert Ryle, Jason Stanley and Carlotta Pavese have famously observed that in addition to propositional knowledge, we can also possess know-how. For example, I know *how* to ride a bike, cook a cake, and recognise different tree species. There is a further debate about whether know-how ultimately reduces to know-that, but I can remain neutral on this.

I will argue that in addition to standpoint knowledge understood as know-that, groups can also acquire standpoint know-how through consciousness raising. One form this can take is as recognitional capacities. Just as skilled doctors can recognise different kinds of illness, the epistemic advantages afforded by certain standpoints consist in the ability to recognise instances of oppression and to recognise oppressions as consisting of a certain kind. For example, it can consist in the ability to recognise microaggressions as microaggressions that would be imperceptible to others, recognising instances of sexual harassment and bad sex, and so on. It is through consciousness raising that groups develop these skills. I will also examine other kinds of socially-situated competences, such as code-switching and emotional labour. These skills are developed by marginalised groups, and again, requires consciousness

raising to perform them under these descriptions. That is, performing these skills under the mode of description are achievements of consciousness raising, not just skill acquisition.

§3 then outlines several upshots:

Objectivity

This account allows us to say how standpoint knowledge is situated but also objective. There is a fact about whether a given bird is a blue tit, and similarly, there is a fact about whether something counts as an instance of oppression. One just needs to train and to occupy the relevant ecological niche.

Hermeneutical injustice and practical agency

My account helps us to locate a new form of hermeneutical injustice. Following Fricker (2007) hermeneutical injustice is the idea that subjects can be marginalised in lacking the conceptual resources to make sense of their situation. I will argue that there are certain skills that subjects can come to perform under a particular mode of description through consciousness-raising. But there will have been a time before the appropriate concepts were developed, such as the concept of 'code-switching'. As such, hermeneutical injustice also limits the act types that individuals can perform under the relevant modes of description.

Inarticulacy

Appealing to the role of know-how in situated knowledge explains why bearers of standpoint advantage many not always be able to explain every point they make. We can imagine someone noting an instance of harassment or microaggression but being flummoxed at the point of explaining why it counts as such. In this case, we shouldn't automatically discount them as being unbelievable. Experts can't always explain their skills. The expert doctor can't always explain why exactly she thinks that the tumour is benign, for example.

Socially-situated competences as expert skill

This presents a new domain of study for philosophers of expertise and skill. A lot of attention has been paid to music, dance, and sports, but I propose that oppressed groups often also develop high-level expertises. There will be interesting similarities but also differences in the development of these skills, since standpoint know-how isn't the subject of training in the same way.

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